

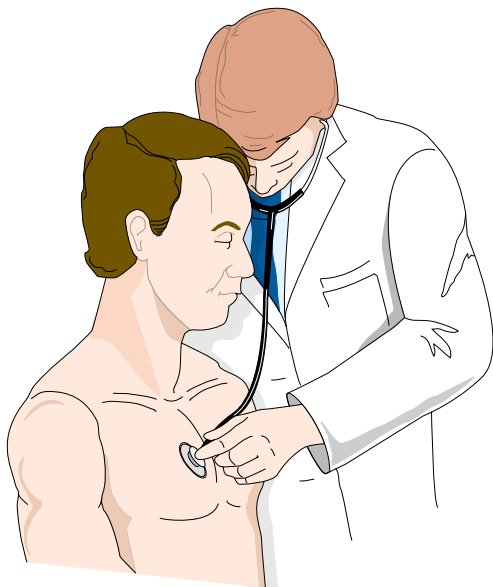
Working With Your Doctor To Better Manage Your Asthma

Have you ever left your doctor's office feeling like you didn't get all of your questions answered—or even asked? For many people, a visit to the doctor can be stressful and even frightening. So, it's not surprising that they leave the doctor's office with many of their questions still unanswered.

Making the Most of Your Doctor's Visit

Because the visit with your doctor is the best time to learn about your asthma, you want to make sure you are prepared. By planning ahead and being prepared, you are less likely to forget your important questions.

Being able to talk with your doctor is a big step in managing your asthma. Good communication



allows you to take charge of your health and work with your doctor to develop the best asthma treatment plan for you. It is your right to know about your health and to understand your asthma. Therefore, you should take responsibility for making sure you and your doctor work together as a team by:

- giving clear information to your doctor about your signs and symptoms,
- listening closely and carefully to the instructions your doctor gives you, and
- asking questions if there is something you don't understand.

Working with Your Doctor

You and your doctor are a team, working together to better manage your asthma. It will be easier for you to do this if you keep in mind the following points when you talk with him or her:

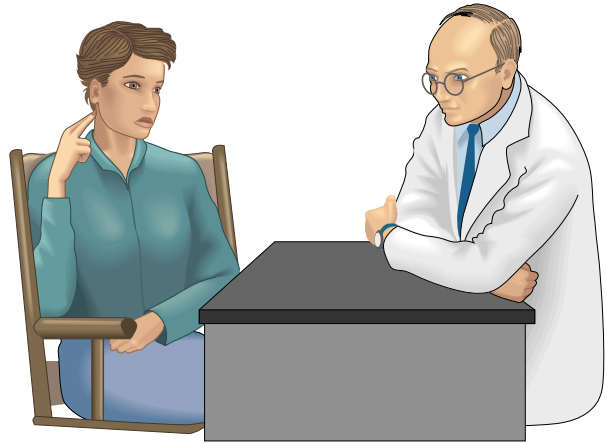
Your health is your responsibility.

Taking an active role in your health care means understanding and agreeing to the instructions that your doctor or his/her staff gives you about your asthma treatment. Make sure you know exactly what you should do, how to do it, and for how long. In addition, know when to see your doctor for routine visits, as well as for urgent ones. If your asthma symptoms are getting worse or you are using more medication than usual, do not wait for your next routine visit. Call your doctor as soon as possible.



Understand your treatment plan.

In order to benefit most from a treatment plan, you must understand it. You should know when and how to take your medications to help you manage your asthma more effectively. You should know what triggers your asthma and how to avoid those triggers when possible. Finally, you should work with your doctor to develop an emergency plan and know when and how to use it. If you are unable to follow your asthma treatment plan, tell your doctor; there may be another option that works for you.



Preparing for Your Next Visit

As you prepare for your next office visit, here are a few points to help you and your doctor develop the best treatment plan for you. Talk to your doctor about:

- what type of symptoms you have and how long they have lasted
- what causes your asthma symptoms
- what types of medicine you take
- whether you are able to exercise
- whether you sleep through the night
- your peak flow readings (if you are currently using one)
- how your daily life is affected by your asthma

At the end of your appointment, make sure you have a good understanding of your asthma treatment plan. If you still have questions, ask your doctor or his or her office staff to explain what you do not understand. At each follow-up visit, update your doctor on the above information. Keeping your doctor informed about changes in your health is part of being a team.

Being Assertive

Because the relationship with your doctor is so important, an assertive approach is best when talking to him or her. Being assertive means being positive and polite while insisting on your right to understand your asthma and the treatment your doctor has planned for you. Here are some ideas to help you to be assertive when talking to your doctor:

Be positive. While you may be upset about your asthma, being positive will help both you and your doctor keep an open mind and improve communication.

Identify your concerns. Is there something you are worried about or don't understand? Discuss it with your doctor.

Bring a list of questions with you. Sometimes it is difficult to remember what you want to talk to your doctor about. Between appointments, write down your questions and concerns and bring them with you to your next visit.

Be specific. Vague or unclear information makes it more difficult for your doctor to develop a treatment plan for you. Give your doctor detailed information about your asthma symptoms.

Take notes. Writing down what you and your doctor talked about makes it easier for you to remember important information about your asthma or your treatment plan.

Be honest about your feelings. If your doctor recommends something you don't agree with or have no intention of doing, tell him or her. Only by working together will you develop and agree on the best asthma treatment plan for you.

Remember that your doctor is human. No one has all the right answers, but each member of your health care team can contribute to your overall treatment plan.

Knowing When to See Your Doctor

You and your doctor should develop a regular schedule for office visits, one that fits your specific treatment plan. These visits will help both of you to monitor your asthma and make changes in your plan as needed.

Unfortunately, there will be times when seeing your doctor is more urgent. Ask your doctor for guidelines on when it is important to call. In addition to the guidelines listed below, he or she may have other times when they want you to call. You should follow your doctors advice and see him or her as soon as possible if:

- Your asthma symptoms are occurring more often or seem worse than usual.
- You are taking your medicine more often to control your symptoms.
- A medicine does not seem to be helping or is making you feel worse.
- Your living arrangements change.

In addition, seek help immediately if any of the following symptoms appear:

- Your asthma keeps getting worse even after taking your medicine and following your action plan.
- Your peak flow reading falls into the Red Zone.
- Your lips or fingernails turn blue.
- Your breathing is rapid and all your attention is focused on breathing.

REMEMBER:

If you are in doubt, contact your doctor.
Your health is nothing to play around with.

Congratulations. You have taken the first steps toward taking charge of your asthma. Being responsible for your health and working with your doctor to manage your asthma puts you in control.



TIPS FOR TALKING WITH DOCTORS

It is important to talk with your doctor in a way that asserts your rights, but does not damage the relationship you are trying to build with your doctor. The reason it is important to have a good relationship with your doctor is that medicines are a key tool in controlling asthma. As your doctor gets to know you better, he or she will be able to adjust your medicines over time.

Here are a few tips for talking with doctors.

- ✓ Get to the point. Taking a list of questions with you will help.
- ✓ Ask the doctor to please tell you exactly what to do.
- ✓ If you are confused, ask the doctor to repeat the information or say it another way. Ask the doctor to write it down or write it down yourself.
- ✓ Learn some of the words doctors use. Tell the doctor when you do not understand a word.
- ✓ Use “I” when making statements about how someone makes you feel, what you want or what is on your mind. Don’t accuse others with “You said...” or “You think.”
- ✓ For example say: “But I understood you to say that I should do this and that” ... instead of: “But you said I should do this and that...”
- ✓ Say: “I feel belittled — or it makes me feel like I am stupid — when we talk this way...” instead of: “You said that in a condescending way” or “You don’t have to put me down!”
- ✓ Stay calm even when you feel yourself getting angry.
- ✓ Don’t agree to do something that you have no intention of doing. Ask if another option is available. Unless your doctor is told that a treatment plan is hard for you, he or she will not know to make changes.

*Adapted from a National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Publication:
A Guide for Helping Children with Asthma*